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# ITALY'S PART IN THE WAR

by W. K. MCCLURE



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## PREFACE

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**T**HIS book is an attempt to remove some of the misunderstandings which have prevented full recognition of Italy's part in the war. I have tried very briefly to reply to most of the criticisms which I have heard so often during the last four years; and I have added certain explanations which seem to help the general aim.

Rome, 1918.



VICTOR EMANUEL, KING OF ITALY.



*Victor Emanuel*

RE D'ITALIA





## CHAPTER I.

### THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE

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**I**N order to understand Italy's part in the European war it is necessary to go back more than forty years, to the events which led up to the Triple Alliance.

The Kingdom of Italy, as it exists to-day, had been formed in successive stages with the help first of France and then of Prussia; and throughout the long struggle for unity Italians had always been able to rely upon the moral and political support of Great Britain. When Italy finally took her place among the great nations of Europe her leaders endeavoured to pursue a policy of equal friendship with all the Powers, but it soon became evident that her interests could not be defended by this policy. Italy could not stand alone in the conflict of ambitions.

Two Powers seemed to threaten her newly won position — Austria and France. Austria was the traditional enemy, still looking with a revengeful eye upon the Italian provinces which had been

freed from the Habsburg yoke by the wars of 1859 and 1866. A large number of Italians, moreover, still remained under Austrian rule, and this formed a problem which seemed to mark the two Powers as natural enemies. France had helped Piedmont to drive the Austrians from Lombardy, but she had supported the Pope and opposed the Italian occupation of Rome, which had been delayed until her hands were tied by the war of 1870.

Austrian hostility seemed the greater danger, and every effort was made by successive Italian governments to maintain good relations with France. There was friction between the two "Latin sisters" during the "seventies", but matters did not come to a head until 1881, when the French occupation of Tunisia dealt a severe blow to Italian hopes. Tunisia had come to be regarded in Italy, by those at least who devoted attention to such questions, as a legitimate sphere of Italian interest. More than 50,000 Italians had settled in the country, their number far exceeded that of the French colony, and Italy's claim to the eventual declaration of a protectorate certainly seemed stronger than that of France, which was based upon the necessity, real or imagined, of protecting the Algerian frontier from disturbance by unruly neighbours.

The feeling in Italy caused by the action of



clearly offered the best guarantee against the dangers which threatened. It gave support against France. It removed the risk of an attack from Austria. The argument was already old that Austria and Italy could only be enemies or allies — there was no half-way house between the two conditions. National sentiment was all against an alliance with Austria. Apart from old memories of cruel oppression, the alliance meant a sacrifice of the hope of completing national unity by the acquisition of the Italian lands still under Austrian rule. But the alliance between Germany and Austria, and the unfriendly attitude of France, had made this hope recede very far. Italy could not afford to indulge her national sentiment. She had to consider her national security. Negotiations were attempted with Germany, but Bismarck indicated that an agreement must first be reached with Austria. After some difficulties this agreement was concluded, and in May 1882 the Dual Alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary was converted into the Triple Alliance by the adhesion of Italy, but Germany and Austria declined to support Italy in the Mediterranean. Six years later the Mediterranean agreement advocated by Baron Sonnino was negotiated with Great Britain. This understanding was reached with the full approval of Bismarck, who no doubt saw

in it a help to his policy of keeping Great Britain and France apart.

Until the early years of this century the Triple Alliance certainly made for peace. As far as Italy was concerned it was essentially a defensive alliance, made and maintained for any but aggressive reasons. It had an additional advantage beyond that of giving protection from the two immediate dangers which had threatened Italian interests. The security which it gave enabled Italy to speak with France on equal terms — a necessary preliminary to the establishment of cordial relations between the two Powers. These good relations were long in coming, but patience and a recognition of common interest at length prevailed. A commercial treaty signed in 1898 put an end to a tariff war which had continued for ten years, and two subsequent agreements, in 1900 and 1902, removed the danger of collision between France and Italy in North Africa.

The years which followed showed that the Triple Alliance did not give a satisfactory guarantee of Italian interests. Although the Alliance had made a truce between Italy and Austria, relations between the two Powers never became cordial. The main obstacle lay in the problem of the Italians who still remained under Austrian rule. Liberal treatment might have killed the

movement in favour of uniting the Italian lands of Austria to the Italian Kingdom, but the Austrian Government was incapable of liberal treatment. The wound was kept open by continual petty persecution of the Italians in the "unredeemed" provinces, and by the encouragement of the Slav elements against the Italian. Austria still believed she could rule by dividing. Another difficulty was the "clericalism" of Austria. The relations between the Papacy and the Italian Government had greatly improved, but there was still opportunity for those who wished to stir up trouble, and Austria threatened to take the place of France as a maker of mischief. A third point was the growing divergence of Austrian and Italian interests and aims in the Balkans.

The Triple Alliance stipulated that Italy and Austria should work hand in hand in the Balkans. Both Powers had declared that it was their object to avoid "territorial changes", but Austria's general policy and various definite acts (notably the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908) ignored these engagements. Italy and Austria appeared more and more clearly as rivals rather than allies.

The Triple Alliance, in fact, was changing in character. Germany and Austria were developing a policy which was to convert it from a

bulwark of defence to an instrument for aggression. Germany was bent upon "world-power"; Austria was cherishing and renewing ambitions in the Near East, and did not realize to what extent she was falling under the influence of her more powerful ally. Italy's position in the alliance was becoming more and more difficult. She had been compelled to sacrifice sentiment to interest and now she saw that her interests were in danger. It was altogether to Italy's disadvantage that Austria should extend her influence in the Balkans. But the real difference lay deeper: Italy's chief interest was peace, and her Allies were working towards war.

When the Triple Alliance was renewed for the fourth and last time, in December 1912, Europe was inevitably moving towards the great catastrophe. But Italy's adhesion to the alliance did not mean her identification with the policy of her Allies. The terms of the alliance did not bind her to make common cause with them in aggressive action, and in fact, during the twenty months which passed between the renewal of the alliance and the outbreak of the European struggle, Italy was almost continually engaged in fighting the tendencies which finally led to war. Austria, backed by Germany, was determined to increase her power in the Balkans. Italy strove to check this movement, and did succeed in delaying it.

The triumph of the Balkan allies in the war against Turkey was a severe blow to German and Austrian hopes ; for the alliance of the Balkan States threatened to block the way to the East. As soon as it became evident that the results of the war would enlarge and strengthen Serbia, Austria proposed that Serbia's increase of territory should be subject to certain guarantees. Italy's consent to this programme was asked, and was given on condition that these guarantees " should not constitute a monopoly, to the exclusive profit of Austria-Hungary, and should not diminish the independence of Serbia ". Austria did not press the matter any further, perhaps, as Signor Tittoni (1) suggested later, " because she was gradually preparing and substituting for this pacific plan the plan of aggression ". In any event, the " pacific plan " was spoiled by the conditions upon which Italy insisted.

Both Germany and Austria were bent upon destroying the Balkan League and undoing the results of its victory, and the unhappy jealousies between the Balkan States made the task easy. But even before the break came, while the Powers were discussing whether Montenegro should be allowed to retain Scutari, Austria was pre-

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(1) At that time Italian Ambassador in Paris.



pared to back diplomacy by military action. In April 1913 she threatened to attack Montenegro. Germany supported the threat, if she did not inspire it. Italy's reply was that if Austrian troops attacked Montenegro she would disembark an expedition on the Albanian coast. She based her proposed action on Article Seven of the Triple Alliance, which provided that neither Italy nor Austria should disturb the situation in the Balkans "by a temporary or permanent occupation" of territory without the consent of the other, and without adequate compensation, previously agreed upon. Signor Tittoni, whose advice was asked by the Italian Foreign Minister, the late Marchese di San Giuliano, was very emphatic in his expression of opinion. He not only insisted on the rights of Italy under Article Seven. He wrote that "the day on which Austria should claim to upset, in any way or to any extent, the equilibrium in the Adriatic, the Triple Alliance would have ceased to exist".

Austria refrained from military action, but continued her mischievous diplomacy, in close co-operation with Germany. The Balkan League broke up, but the second Balkan war led to a result very different from that upon which Germany and Austria had calculated. Bulgaria was defeated in a few weeks. Serbia gained much,

both in territory and prestige. The fact was intolerable to Austria-Hungary, and on the day before the Treaty of Bukarest was signed by the Balkan Powers she proposed that Italy should consent to her attacking Serbia. Italy refused to consider the shameful proposal, and her Allies were not yet prepared to act without her agreement. It was evident, however, that the thrust against Serbia was only delayed until a more favourable moment — that the Triple Alliance, therefore, stood on a shaking foundation.

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she warned them that her neutrality was only provisional. No time was lost in making the first point clear to the world. On August 4 the Italian Government published a declaration of neutrality, pointing out that the conditions which would have compelled Italy to take up arms with Germany and Austria had not been fulfilled. The importance of this declaration was great. Until it was known that Italy would not join her Allies, France had to provide against an attack upon her south-eastern frontier, and France and England had to face the possibility of a dangerous situation in the Mediterranean. The joint fleets of Austria and Italy, strengthened by the German cruisers *Goeben* and *Breslau*, would have given much anxiety. Italy's prompt declaration of neutrality swept away these preoccupations. The Austrian fleet was penned in the Adriatic, and the *Goeben* and the *Breslau* ran for Constantinople. The waters of the Mediterranean remained free for France and England, free for the passage of troops and merchandise. Still more important was the fact that France could leave the Italian frontier unguarded, and use all her strength to meet the German onslaught. If Italy had joined the Powers who were then her Allies, or if she had played a waiting game, France could not have concentrated her forces. Without this

concentration the resistance on the Marne could hardly have prevailed, and the Germans might have made their triumphant entry into Paris.

Public opinion in France and England has never quite realized the importance of Italy's decision. This failure is to Italy's honour. It shows the estimate in which she was held by the countries who are now her allies. The ordinary Englishman or Frenchman scarcely glanced at the possibility of Italy joining in the great crime. He took it for granted that she would hold aloof. Before long, indeed, people began to show impatience because Italy did not immediately make common cause with the Entente. The immense advantage to the Entente of Italy's declaration of neutrality was largely ignored or forgotten. The difficulties of her position were only realized by a few.

It is clearly unjust that the value, moral and material, of Italy's decision should be ignored because that decision appeared to most people inevitable, because it seemed unthinkable that Italy should be false to her own best traditions. We are rightly proud that we did not tolerate the German invasion of Belgium, and we know the effect of our intervention. Yet it would have been easier, more "justifiable", for Italy to follow her allies to war than for England to remain aloof



THE CROWN PRINCE OF ITALY IN BOY-SCOUT'S UNIFORM.



from her friends. Italy had only to adopt the argument of her allies and of many British pacifists, and allege that Germany and Austria were driven to make war in self-defence, hemmed in as they were by a ring of hostile nations. Resting on such an argument Italy could have invoked Clause IV of the Triple Alliance:

" In case a Great Power not signatory of  
" the present Treaty should threaten the State  
" security of one of the high contracting parties,  
" and in case the threatened party should thereby  
" be compelled to declare war against that Great  
" Power, the two other contracting parties engage  
" themselves to maintain benevolent neutrality to-  
" wards their ally. Each of them reserves its right,  
" in this case, to take part in the war if it thinks  
" fit in order to make common cause with its  
" ally ".

For Italy the argument was impossible. The use of it involved either ignorance or dishonesty, and the men who governed the country were neither ignorant nor dishonest. They knew the facts, faced them and acted on them. Italy's attitude during the critical days and her eventual declaration of neutrality were in effect as definite a condemnation of German and Austrian action as Great Britain's declaration of war.

This condemnation was fully approved by the



vast majority of Italians. Even at this early date, before all the facts were exposed in their nakedness, the instinct and good sense of the Italian people did not err. They pointed straight to those who were guilty of the war. The declaration of neutrality came as an immense relief. It must be remembered that the provisions of the Triple Alliance were secret, that the obligations which it involved were not generally known. Many people had believed that the terms of the Alliance might demand Italian intervention on the side of Germany and Austria. It was mainly for this reason, though partly from a genuine admiration for German efficiency, that the small Nationalist party at first raised its voice in favour of marching with the Allies of thirty years' standing; others, though they did not express the feeling, leaned the same way. After the declaration of neutrality, with its explicit statement that the terms of the Alliance did not oblige Italy to intervene, the question fell to the ground. The general conscience of Italy gave hearty approval to the decision of the Government.

It should never be forgotten that Italy had a choice. The other Great Powers, practically speaking, had none. Once the strings were pulled at Berlin, and Austria jerked her puppet limbs across the Danube, only a wilful blindness

to honour and interest alike could have led to any different action, on the part of Russia, France or England, from that which these Powers actually took. Italy had a choice. Two things determined her decision : first, the fact that neither Government nor country could join hands with Germany and Austria ; second, the conviction which dawned in the minds of a few that now was the time to complete Italian unity.

So far it has been possible to speak generally of Italy, without drawing any sharp distinction between Government and people. Practically the whole force of the country was behind the declaration of neutrality. All Italy disavowed the action of her Allies. The first choice was as nearly unanimous as any national decision can be ; but before very long it became evident that the road along which it led divided in two. A second choice had to be faced, and Government and people approached the crossroad in a different spirit. The Government was moving within the hampering limits of a written treaty ; public opinion, ignorant of the terms of the treaty, argued upon broad lines.

It has been seen that early in the desperate week which preceded the war Italy raised the question of the Italian lands under Austrian rule, and indicated that she would look here for com-

pensation under the terms of the Alliance. From that position the Italian Government never receded. If Austria would not meet Italian demands in regard to the "unredeemed" provinces, the Triple Alliance would be at an end, and Italy would be free to act as interest and inclination should dictate.

In the first rush and swirl of the war the diplomats had to stand aside. Germany and Austria were confident of early victory, and had no mind to discuss the claim of their Ally. The terms of the treaty did not weigh with them at all. They believed that Italy could be ignored, and that was enough to justify to them the breaking of a pledged word. They knew that Italy was in no way prepared for war. The Giolitti Government, which had gone out of office a few months before, had left the Army in a deplorable condition as regards munitions and equipment. Germany and Austria believed that the war would be over before Italy could be ready to back her demands by force, the only argument they appreciated.

The reaffirmation of the attitude taken up by the Italian Government at the end of July was delayed owing to the illness and death (October '16) of the Italian Foreign Minister, San Giuliano. Before his last illness came upon him San Giuliano had in preparation a Note which was



to put the Italian case in detail, and repeat the warning given in July. There was a short interval before Baron Sonnino could be induced to accept the post of Foreign Minister ; some time was necessary before he could master the details of the position and decide upon his course of action ; it was not until December 9 that he stated the Italian case in a formal Note to Vienna. The Note went straight to the point : " The  
" actual military advance of Austria-Hungary in  
" Serbia constitutes a fact which must be an object  
" of examination by the Italian and Austro-Hungarian  
" Governments on the basis of the stipulations  
" contained in Article VII of the Triple Alliance.  
" From this article derives the obligation of the  
" Austro-Hungarian Government, even in the case  
" of temporary occupations, to come to a previous  
" agreement with Italy and to arrange for com-  
" pensations. The Imperial and Royal Govern-  
" ment ought, therefore, to have approached us  
" and come to an agreement with us before send-  
" ing its troops across the Serbian frontier ".

It is unnecessary to follow in detail the long course of the conversations between Italy, Austria and Germany, which went on from December 1914 till April 1915. Austria quibbled and fenced. Count Berchtold first, and then his successor Baron Burian, twisted and turned and

sought to evade the obligations of the Treaty of Alliance. The Austrian arguments were remarkable. They were chiefly devoted to a demonstration of the inconvenience which would be caused by carrying out the terms of the Alliance. The fact that a pledged word was involved did not hamper them at all. The solemn engagements of a treaty signed and re-signed meant as little to Austria now as they had mattered to Germany in the case of Belgium. In both cases the one mainspring of argument, as of conduct, was expediency.

Austria argued that it would not be expedient to fulfil her obligations under Article Seven. Germany, more far-sighted though equally lacking in any sense of honour, realized that Italy meant business, and that it might be advisable to pay due regard to the Treaty of Alliance, in seeming at least. Prince von Bülow, who replaced Herr von Flotow at Rome, towards the end of 1914, set about to play the part of the honest broker. He worked very hard to clear the ground of the preliminary difficulties, and after more than three months' discussion Austria was finally induced to make an offer of "compensation". The offer was ridiculously inadequate, and Baron Sonnino's counter-proposals showed what a gulf separated the Italian and Austrian points of view. Italy, or the man who

spoke for her, was determined to settle the problem of the "unredeemed" lands, to win the frontiers to which she was entitled, and to protect her interests under the terms of the Alliance. Austria quite failed to understand this determination. In fact, she mistook the whole position. Her manner of viewing treaty obligations prevented her from realizing that Italy was not selling her neutrality, but was making a claim under a solemn agreement. Austria looked upon Italy's neutrality as a negotiable article, and was prepared to offer for it what she considered a reasonable price. She did not realize the force of Italy's national aspirations, and in any event she was determined to keep a frontier that should maintain her military advantage over Italy. This was the more necessary as she had no intention of abiding by any agreement which might be reached. Her whole attitude made this clear enough, and the last doubt was removed later, when Count Tisza declared openly that the negotiations with Italy had only been undertaken in order to gain time.

When it became evident that the Triple Alliance was practically at an end, Baron Sonnino turned to the Triple Entente. Italy's Allies had broken the letter as well as the spirit of the Alliance when they went to war without con-

sulting her. But the policy of over thirty years could hardly be abandoned in a day. It was only natural that San Giuliano should refrain from seizing the first chance of breaking loose from the Alliance, although he entered a formal protest and gave a solemn warning. It must always be remembered that at that date very few people realized the aims or methods of Germany and Austria, and what they stood for in the world. When Baron Sonnino came to the Foreign Office he found the lines of policy traced by his predecessor. There seemed no valid reason to depart from them. He was bound, not only by the tradition of thirty years, but by a recent declaration which appealed to the Treaty of Alliance.

In the end it became evident that the interests of Italy could not be secured by the continuance of even the formal alliance with Germany and Austria. And Austria's failure, her second failure, to pay due regard to the terms of the Alliance, gave back to Italy her freedom of action. San Giuliano's warning was fulfilled. The Triple Alliance was "irrevocably broken". Baron Sonnino speedily negotiated an agreement with the Entente Powers, an agreement which promised to Italy her "unredeemed" provinces, a satisfactory military frontier, and certain regions on



Gabriele D'Annunzio delivering his commemoration of the "Thousand"  
on the cliff of Quarto near Genoa.



Gabriele D'Annunzio the Poet Soldier.





the east coast of the Adriatic the possession of which would redress her very unfavourable naval position vis-à-vis to Austria. This agreement pledged Italy to declare war upon Austria within a month, and to consider herself from that date to be at war with the enemies of her new Allies (1).

By a slow and difficult path, hampered by long tradition, beset with many uncertainties, the men who guided Italy's destinies came to the brink of war against their former Allies. They chose war deliberately. They took upon themselves the immense responsibility, for they realized that only force of arms could secure Italian unity, and they held that only force of arms could make safe the future of a greater Italy. And at the end they recognized, what had not been so clear during the first bewildering months, that the war was far more than a political and military struggle, that it was in reality a conflict between two moralities, a conflict from which Italy could not stand aloof. Their vision saw beyond the immediate ambitions, and perhaps it was what they saw there that gave them courage to assume the burden of war.

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(1) For a further discussion of the London Agreement see Chapter V.

The men who took the formal decision for Italy did not omit to weigh the chances, to work out plans, to ensure safeguards and provide for the future. That was the clear duty of men placed as they were, and it is strange to find brought against them sometimes the charge that they were slow to decide, that they showed a calculating spirit. Surely they could do no less. There was no previous obligation, as in the case of the other Great Powers of Europe, to hurry into war. It was right that Italy's leaders should come step by step, in cold blood, to the tremendous choice.

While the declaration of neutrality had the whole people behind it, there was no such unanimity during the months which followed. Public opinion was in the dark regarding the further provisions of the Triple Alliance. All that was known for certain was the fact that there had been no obligation for Italy to join her Allies, but between holding aloof and taking the field against them seemed a very long step. Educated opinion was sharply divided. From the early days of the war there was a strong movement in favour of Italy's intervention against Austria and Germany. Those who supported intervention maintained that it was called for by the interests both of Italy and of civilization. As time went



on some of them went so far as to protest against the conversations between the Italian Government and that of Austria, and declared that to have any dealings with her former Allies would render Italy an accomplice of their crimes. On the other hand, there was a numerous and powerful body of opinion which was opposed to war. There were many reasons which made this opposition most natural. Italy had been allied to Germany and Austria for more than thirty years. Though the Alliance had never been popular, Italy had prospered greatly during this period, and much of her prosperity had been due to the association of German money and enterprise with her industry. There was a natural feeling against reversing the policy of a whole generation. Nor was it interest only that inspired this feeling. There were very many Italians who felt that a complete turn-round would not be "playing the game". Others, who had no tenderness for Germany or Austria, thought mainly of Germany's colossal military power, built up by forty years of preparation, and judged that it was madness for Italy to join in the struggle. There were others again who believed that even victory would be too dearly bought. They argued that Italy was not rich enough, and not enough developed, to stand the strain of modern war. In

their view war, even victorious war, mean revolution and ruin.

In spite of all these forcible arguments the movement in favour of intervention grew with the passing of the months. It was but slowly that the truth had its effect upon the great mass of Italian opinion, which had no very definite views on the subject of peace or war, and was content to leave decision to its leaders. Progress was difficult, for German propaganda was well organized and very active, and there was no organized Entente propaganda at all. Still, the truth gained ground, and the old antagonism to Austria, the traditional enemy, was reinforced by a new feeling, a feeling against Germany. The story of Belgium sank into the minds of the people. It was not easy for Italians to believe in the story of deeds of which they could never have been guilty, but German propaganda helped to bring home the incredible truth. For as the chances of war grew greater German agents went about threatening that in the event of war Italy's "punishment" would be greater than that of Belgium. They did not mince words. They threatened openly — destruction, murder, rape. Italy began to understand. Feeling deepened. Anger kindled.

When the spring was drawing to a close the

Italian people was ready for war. It did not desire war. There was little heady enthusiasm. But the country was quite prepared to accept the decision of its leaders. On May 8 came the news of the sinking of the Lusitania. "The effect upon the populace" — I quote from an account written shortly afterwards — "was quite extraordinary. For the first time a note of real anger was heard in the streets and the shops, along the by-ways and in little taverns. The tragedy of Belgium had been told to the people, and its horror had begun to sink in. But all Belgium was enveloped in the fog of war, and there was still a feeling that the worst stories might be exaggerations, that German ruthlessness might have had some provocation, and that in many cases there was the excuse of the anger born of battle and danger. Here was a crime committed in the sight of all the world, upon the peaceful seas, against a helpless multitude in which were included many women and children. The feeling against Germany, which had been slowly growing, broke into a blaze."

For the first time, the Italian people was really stirred. The sinking of the Lusitania clinched conviction. It was the public, brazen confirmation of German insolence and cruelty, the

flaming proof that the Allied indictment of Germany was true.

The proof came at a critical moment. The Alliance with Austria had been denounced five days before, though the fact was not yet public, and Germany and Austria were mobilizing their last reserves, in the hope of preventing the final step — an Italian declaration of war against Austria. They offered further concessions, and knowing that Baron Sonnino would not listen they went behind the Italian Government and appealed to the Opposition — to the Parliamentary leaders who were not in favour of Italy's intervention. For a moment it seemed as though these intrigues might succeed. Signor Giolitti, the leader of the « Neutralists » and the most powerful force in Italian politics, came to Rome, and his supporters rallied round him. He had long commanded a majority both in the Senate and the Chamber. It was clear that if this following held together he could overthrow the Government. Excitement was already intense when it was announced that Signor Salandra had resigned.

Italy rose in anger. From North to South a great cry of protest went up against the intrigues of the foreigner, and against the Italians who had lent themselves to those intrigues. In 48 hours it was made plain that a change of

government would not be tolerated. Signor Sallandra was recalled to power, and on May 20 the will of the country was recorded by the solemn vote of both Chamber and Senate.

It mattered nothing that at the moment the Russians, so lately triumphant, were being driven headlong back through Galicia, almost helpless through shortage of arms and ammunition. Italy's Allies should never forget that when the Italian people confirmed the decision of their leaders the war was turning against us.

Two months earlier, when prospects on the Eastern front looked very bright, there was no such war feeling in Italy. Many had realized the great issues, but they were still a small minority. There was at most, speaking generally, a readiness to take the field in order to complete the national unity. A great change came in a short time. A wider vision began to dawn. The final blunder of the enemy, the *coup* that was to prevent war, the attempt to manoeuvre behind the back of the Government, converted innumerable waverers; and others changed their view when it was made known how Austria had broken the Alliance. One issue at least had become plain, that only war could make Italy free.

There were clearer eyes which saw farther

still, and there was a general instinct that felt, if it did not see. If there were those in Italy who did not realize the full import of the struggle, they had their counterpart in every Allied country. How many Englishmen, Frenchmen, Americans, had understood three years ago?





Popular demonstrations in favour of War at Rome, Naples etc.







## CHAPTER III.

### ITALY AT WAR: THE DIFFICULTIES OF PREPARATION AND EQUIPMENT

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**W**HEN the European war broke out the Italian Army was very badly equipped, even judging by the generally accepted standards of the time, which were so soon to be proved obsolete. The late Government had failed to make good the wastage caused by the Libyan war, and there were great deficiencies in every kind of munitions, equipment and stores. Italy had good men, good rifles, and a fair proportion of good field-guns, but there was a very serious shortage in practically everything else that goes to make an Army. The war was to show very quickly the importance of heavy artillery and of machine-guns. In both of these Italy was deplorably weak. Even on paper, the Italian Army had a lower proportion of machine-guns to men than any other Great Power, and the actual number available was far below the paper strength. There were a few batteries

of good medium-calibre guns and howitzers, but there was no modern heavy artillery except in fortresses. Although Italy had been the first country to use aeroplanes in war, lack of money and a failure in insight on the part of those in high places had prevented the development in military aviation which had been urged by those who understood its importance. In August 1914 the Italian military air service was worth comparatively little.

In almost every kind of war material the Italian Army was very short of what was then considered necessary. Even if war requirements had agreed with pre-war calculations there was an immense amount of leeway to be made up. It is common knowledge now that every calculation, on the Allied side at least, was upset. Old requirements were multiplied tenfold, a hundredfold; completely new requirements came into being.

In August 1914 Italy had to begin to fill up the gaps, for it was clear that in the clamorous new world of war there was no place for an insufficiently armed nation. During the months which followed the gaps widened, quickly, enormously; and effort did not keep pace with need. When the time came for Italy to join in the struggle, her army was still very imperfectly equipped to meet the immense demands of modern war.

A common question is : why did not Italy make adequate preparation during the nine months of her neutrality, when there was no consumption of war material, except for ordinary wear and tear, and all the energies of the country might have been devoted to producing what was necessary ? It seems at first sight a pertinent question. After all, it might be argued, Italy was not plunged into war from one day to another. She had time, surely, to study requirements and to prepare accordingly.

The argument is not difficult to answer. In the first place it must be remembered that during the period of neutrality the Italian Government was in no position to concentrate upon the question of material preparation for war. The first problem to be decided, as the previous chapter has shown, was whether Italy could or would join in the struggle. Till that tremendous decision was taken it was practically, if not theoretically, impossible to devote adequate attention to the problem of war material. Those who make the criticism indicated above forget that Italy was only brought gradually to the brink of war, that the energies of the men who had charge of her destinies were chiefly, and necessarily, devoted to steering their way through an exceedingly difficult diplomatic and political

situation. At the best their task was very complicated, and they were further handicapped by the fact that they could not take the country into their confidence. They were hampered by precedent and protocol, by the definite obligation of silence. They could not publish, during these anxious months, the arguments which when they saw the light convinced many an anxious waverer and many a stubborn "neutralist". The work of "moral preparation" was rendered much more difficult by the fact that the terms of the Triple Alliance were secret, and until the moral preparation was well advanced, until in fact it was probable, if not yet certain, that Italy could and would intervene, the Government could hardly work out and press forward a comprehensive programme of material preparation for war. It was almost inevitable that they should confine themselves to filling the most obvious gaps.

It may be that Italy was slow to realize the necessities of the new warfare. If so, she may very well be excused. For others made the same mistake, with infinitely less reason. Only a few weeks before Italy joined the Allies Mr. Asquith affirmed stoutly that we had never suffered from a shortage of shells. If the British Prime Minister could make such an assertion after eight months' intimately tragic experience of war, there

might seem to be good reason for an Italian failure to judge better from a distance. In modern war it is not true that the looker-on sees most of the game. The special developments and consequent necessities left all the standards of 1914 so quickly behind that only first-hand experience could convince. If Italy was slow to understand there was ample cause. In any case, we who took so long to feel the facts which were continually being hammered into us have little right to speak.

Furthermore, if Italy had understood requirements much sooner than she did, even if by some miracle of foresight she had understood at once, it would have been materially impossible to carry out an adequate programme. During the months of waiting she was not even able to meet the demands which were known to be necessary. For she had little money; her manufacturing capacities were very limited; her resources in metals were largely undeveloped, and she had no coal.

During the neutrality period the commodities which Italy had need of were eagerly sought after by countries already engaged in the war, countries who were far richer and whose need was more obviously urgent. Italy had little chance in the competition for war material, or



for the wherewithal to make it. Till her decision was taken, she had of course to rely almost entirely upon her own limited resources. Nor when she joined in the struggle was the situation greatly changed, to begin with at least. Great Britain and France lent money, but money was the smaller part of the problem. As regards material, others were before her in the market. Great Britain and France, so far from being in a position to give adequate help, were still unable to meet their own requirements and those of Russia, and they had the first call upon the manufacturing resources of the United States. Italy had to be content with the leavings, and they were scanty enough.

It must be remembered that Italy was far less developed industrially than any of the other Great Powers. There were, of course, important manufacturing industries which had grown rapidly in the years preceding the war, but Italian manufactures as compared with those of Great Britain and France, Germany and Austria, were still in their infancy. Moreover, owing to the comparative lack of raw material and the complete lack of coal, Italy had far less capacity for quick development within her own frontiers. Great Britain could transform her immense industrial resources to war uses; and to a lesser degree

the same was true of France. And both countries had coal. Though France had not enough, England's great surplus lay so near that it was readily available. Italy's own resources were very limited, and her industrial population relatively very small. Her effort had to begin a stage further back than that of Great Britain or France. With Italy it was less a question of transforming industry than of creating it.

An illustration may make things clearer. Suppose that on the outbreak of war Great Britain's industrial population had been one quarter of what it was. Suppose that our industrial activities had been limited to Birmingham, Coventry, Bristol, Hull, Plymouth, Luton (where straw hats are made), and a few other minor manufacturing centres or ports of call. Suppose that the rest of the country had been like Kent, Dorset, Hampshire, Suffolk, or the Scottish Highlands. Suppose that our production of iron ore had been one twenty-fifth, and our production of pig-iron less than one twentieth, of what they actually were. Suppose that we had had only a dozen blast furnaces in the country instead of over three hundred. Suppose, lastly, that all our coal had had to be brought across two thousand miles of sea. It is only, perhaps, by some such comparison that one can form an idea of Italy's difficulties.

Italy's coal requirements before the war were very modest, a little under eleven million tons being used in 1913, about one twentieth of the total amount consumed by the United Kingdom, and only a little more than half what we burned in blast furnaces alone.

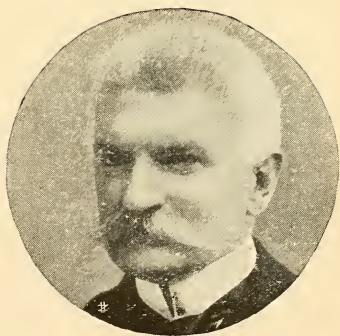
As soon as the European war broke out, coal imports began to diminish, and during the last five months of 1914 Italy received over a million tons less than in the corresponding period of the previous year. During the first five months of 1915 the deficit as compared with the previous year was nearly a million tons, so that during the whole neutrality period Italy had to be content with nearly twenty-five per cent less coal than the small amount which had served her peace requirements. The handicap to industrial effort may be readily understood from these figures.

An equal difficulty was experienced, all through the neutrality period, in obtaining material for the iron and steel industries. The import figures were much below the peace average. Italy could not make adequate preparation for war. And so she went to war unprepared.

During the three years which have elapsed Italy has industrialized herself to an undreamed-of extent. But all her efforts have been hampered



**Antonio Salandra**  
the Italian Premier  
who declared War on Austria.



**Baron Sidney Sonnino**  
the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs  
during the whole period of the War.



by the difficulty of obtaining raw material and coal. Mainly owing to shortage of tonnage, though partly on account of the lack of adequate accommodation and organization in Italian ports, the importation of coal and metals could never keep pace with requirements. The coal question in particular has caused the gravest difficulty and anxiety. In 1916 coal imports fell to eight million tons, but last year the situation became much more serious. The total importation from all sources came to 5,037,497 tons. This was less than half the pre-war figure, and about one-eighth of the amount consumed in the domestic stoves and fireplaces of the United Kingdom. Nor was there any great improvement during the first months of this year. Only the strictest economy and the patient acceptance of great discomfort, of much actual suffering, have carried Italy through these long months of crisis.

The supply of metals and fuel would have fallen still more short of the demand if Italy had not been able to develop resources which had hitherto been untouched, or largely neglected. Remote iron deposits have been investigated and opened up. Lignite and peat, which were not worth burning except on the spot when coal was cheap and easily obtainable, have been used in considerable quantity, and Italy, like Great



Britain, has been driven to cut down her trees. Vast quantities of wood have been used as fuel for railway locomotives and for central-heating furnaces, as well as for military purposes, so that the precious and scanty coal may be reserved for the most urgent uses of war and transport. It must be remembered that the work of developing new resources was necessarily hindered by the shortage of the very commodities which were being sought. To extract metals and fuel from the stubborn earth, and transport them to where they were needed, required the use of metals and fuel: machines, railway engines, railway trucks and coal. These were all wanting. They were claimed first by the more immediate demands of the war. It was only gradually that the material could be spared which was required for tapping new supplies.

The tonnage problem is easier now ; the work of opening up fresh iron and lignite deposits is bearing fruit ; the use of water-power is increasing. A great war machinery plant has been installed, though there would be room and scope for much more if it were possible to secure enough metals and enough coal. As it is, factories have often had to close down or work half-time, owing to shortage of fuel or material. And owing to lack of coal a number of new furnaces have never been used.

Looking back over the long struggle to overtake the remorseless and ever-increasing demands of the war, it seems almost incredible that Italy should have done what she has done. Yet all her effort, supplemented by such help as the Allies have been able to give in the way of munitions, has not till very recently been able to keep pace with demands. During three years' fighting there were never enough guns, there was never abundance of shells. It is only now that the balance begins to hold level. And still there is no surplus.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### ITALY AT WAR: HER TASK AND HER ACHIEVEMENTS

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**T**HE difficulties in the way of preparation for war, both political and military, have been briefly indicated. And Italy's special difficulties did not end with these. A glance at the map shows the great inferiority of her strategic position in regard to Austria. The frontier with which Italy had to be content after the war of 1866 (1) not only left outside her borders a large number of Italians. It gave to an unfriendly neighbour an immense military advantage.

The possession of the Trentino by the Austrians disregards the natural mountain barrier which roughly divides the Teuton and Latin races. The Trentino, Italy's by right of race and assigned to her by Napoleon in 1811, runs down like a great wedge into Italian territory, opening

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(1) Bismarck, like Napoleon III, made peace with Austria when he had gained his own ends, but before the just claims of his Italian allies had been assured.

a wide gateway upon her rich northern plains. Such a gap in her natural defences would constitute an injustice and a danger wherever it were situated, but the position is made very much worse by the fact that the line comes so far west. A successful enemy advance from the Trentino would cut off the wide stretch of territory that lies to the east — the plains of Venetia and Friuli, the mountain regions of Cadore and Carnia. This is the main controlling fact that must govern any discussion of the Italian campaign.

The long frontier, longer than the allied battle-front in France, divides itself roughly into three sectors. 1. The Trentino. 2. The great barrier of the Dolomites and the Carnic Alps. 3. The eastern frontier from Pontebba to the sea.

In the first of these sectors the Austrian had an immense advantage. The flanks of the great salient were well protected ; on the west by a huge Alpine mass, traversed by only two feasible passes, the Stelvio and the Tonale ; on the east by the towering rocks of the Dolomites. On the flanks the conditions were equally difficult for both sides. Everywhere else the Austrians held the commanding positions. The general line of the Trentino wedge is broken by little wedges thrust forward to dominate all the routes of approach — to block an Italian advance or cover an Austrian

invasion. Everywhere the Italians had to fight uphill. In the second sector it may be said that the Dolomites of Cadore and the Ampezzano and the savage Carnic Alps made operations on an important scale almost equally difficult for either side, though the Austrians, owing to the lie of the mountain ranges on their side of the frontier, had a decided advantage in the way of lateral communications.

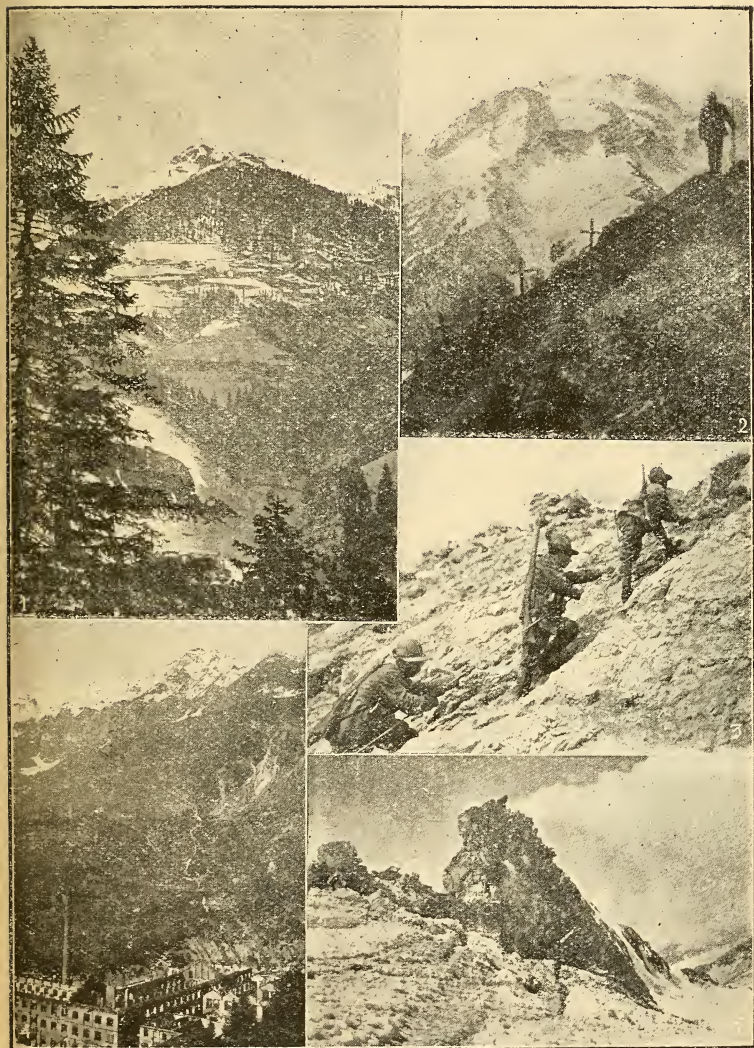
The third sector offered the best chances for an Italian attack, but here also the conditions were exceedingly unfavourable. From Pontebba to the Isonzo valley great mountains blocked the way. The upper and middle reaches of the Isonzo flow through a wild mountainous country, which was badly provided with roads. Only the extreme southern stretch of the frontier, the twenty miles from Cormons to the sea, gave a gap where conditions were equal. But this gap had little depth. Less than ten miles from the frontier lies the rocky plateau of the Carso, which together with the hills near Gorizia commands all the low ground to the west. The position was very fairly summed up in a general order which was issued to the Austrian army on the Isonzo line at the beginning of the war. The troops were told that they were in the position of men in a six-story building which had to be



attacked from the level. Encouraged by this favourable situation they were "to decimate and destroy" the enemy. Such was the Austrian opinion, fully justified by the facts, of the conditions in the sector most favourable to the Italians.

Two courses of action were open to Italy when she entered the war. She could hold on the north, and push towards the east. Or she could stand on the defensive in the east and devote her attention to eliminating the Trentino danger. The first alternative was chosen, for reasons which cannot be gainsaid.

To begin with, the southern sector of the eastern line gave the best chance for the development of a big offensive. There was adequate space, and the communications were sufficient. And the natural obstacles, however great, were much less formidable than anywhere else. Secondly, a very important objective lay comparatively near. A successful advance upon Trieste would have dealt a crushing blow to Austria. It would have meant infinitely more than the occupation of the Trentino, both from the military point of view and the political. A successful invasion of the Trentino could hardly have led any further, for northern Tyrol must be considered impregnable. Austria could scarcely receive a vital wound from any operations in this direction. The occupation



1. Col di Lana seen from the Cordevole Valley. — 2. Scout on Col di Lana.  
 3. Alpini climbing the Tofana. — 4. Arsiero and Mount Pria Forà. — 5. Shelters  
 for the Alpini on the Adamello.



of Trieste, on the other hand, besides being important in itself as an Italian triumph and an Austrian defeat, besides being a goal might well have been a starting point for further military success. And it might have had grave political consequences : it might have hastened the disruptive tendencies within the Austrian Empire.

These considerations could not be neglected, and General Cadorna took the bold course : the bold course, for it meant carrying out his principal military operations a hundred miles east of the dangerous salient of the Trentino, which was an ever-present threat to his communications. This meant that he could not bestow his whole strength upon the point selected for his offensive. In addition to his main thrust he had to carry out what may be described as an active defensive in the Trentino salient. He had to close the open door even if he could not bolt and bar it. This was successfully accomplished in the early days of the war, when quick forward movements reduced the advantage held by the enemy, but the fact that the door could only be closed, not locked, meant that the Italian Army was never free from the fear of a blow in the back. It meant also that a large number of men and guns were necessary to protect the threatened lines.

The question has been asked, and will be

asked again, no doubt, why the Italians could not combine more vigorous action on the north with their main push towards the east. The answer is the same as that which must be returned to the question why various tempting military enterprises were not undertaken by Italy's allies at various periods of the war: " Not enough troops and not enough munitions ".

In 1914 Italy's active army consisted of 25 infantry divisions with artillery, and 3 cavalry divisions, with a mobilisation strength of about 400,000 combatants. There was in addition the organized Mobile Militia, consisting of men between 29 and 32 years of age, who had served their time with the colours and in the first reserve - eight years in all. The total strength of this force was about 320,000, the organization taking in some 200,000 men on mobilization. Behind these first- and second-line forces was the Territorial Militia, organized in infantry battalions, fortress artillery companies and engineer companies, made up of the older classes of trained men and those who had had no military training. It must be remembered that Italy's first- and second-line organization was small in proportion to her population. Only a sufficient number of men was taken each year to fill the peace establishment of the Army, with the result that only about 35



per cent of each annual " class " joined the colours for full training. The proportion of untrained men in the Reserve and Territorial Militia was therefore very large.

Italy had nine months in which to expand her peace organization, and though for political reasons which have been explained that time could not be used to the full, much was done. A great number of new formations were raised, but there were two main difficulties — officers and munitions. It is too often forgotten that man-power pure and simple is a factor that comes into play comparatively late, when organization, both on the front and at home, is relatively complete. In the early months of the war what counted was the man-power which was already trained, organized and adequately officered. Expansion was necessarily a slow and tedious work, strictly conditioned by the supply of officers and equipment. It follows that only a limited number of the new Italian formations were ready for war in May 1915. And the word " ready " is not really justified, for there were not enough guns and machine-guns to go round.

It will be clear that the number of troops available for war in the summer of 1915 was very small in relation to the frontier of 484 miles, all the more so when the unfavourable conditions



on the Trentino border are taken into account. It is often said that a great part of the long frontier must be left out of calculation, owing to impossibility of conducting military operations on a large scale among the higher Alps or the Dolomites. That is only true to a certain extent, for modern war has swarmed over the mountains and peopled the inaccessible places. In earlier days war was confined to the valleys, where the little armies of those times met and fought with ample room for quick victory or defeat. Military operations must still follow the main routes, the main gaps in the barrier, but man's incredible efforts have made it possible to outflank those gaps by movements which would have been judged impossible a few years ago. An important advance must always depend upon the main routes, but these main routes may be opened by other means than direct frontal attack. No line can be left unguarded, even in the Alpine and Dolomite regions. It is true that the number of men required to defend these crests and ridges is small in comparison with their actual extent in mileage, but on the other hand the number of men required for transport is relatively very large. The difficulty of conveying food and ammunition to the soldiers in line is immense. On a rough calculation it may be said that to keep one man in

the " battle positions " meant having no less than six men behind him. And even that proportion meant changing the troops in line all too seldom.

Italy's special difficulties have been briefly indicated. It remains to give some brief account of her achievements. These have been clouded unjustly by the disaster of Caporetto, which not only wiped out nearly all the gains of twenty-nine months' hard fighting but led to the loss of Cadore, Carnia, Friuli and a part of the Veneto. The great value of Italy's contribution to the Allied cause can no longer be measured in terms of victorious advance or of territory occupied. Yet it remains almost incalculable ; and indeed that was never the right way to estimate her services. Putting aside for a moment the moral significance of Italy's intervention, of her patience and long effort on behalf of freedom and justice, we have only to consider what would have been the material effect upon the course of the war if she had remained neutral. In the summer of 1915, when armies were smaller than they became later, though still gigantic in comparison with previous wars, the Italians engaged permanently some 400,000 Austrian troops, who would otherwise have been free for operations elsewhere. By the following year the number of Italy's adversaries was increased by fifty per cent, and the Austrians

were put to a constant strain to replace the heavy losses caused by the fighting that went on almost without a break from May till November. Last year Italy's task became heavier still, owing to the gradual decay of the Russian resistance. All through the summer she had to fight against the pick of the Austrian army, kept up to strength by a continuous flow of men and guns from the Eastern Front. In the autumn, when Russia had completely gone out of the struggle, the enemy forces on the Italian Front were increased to 62 divisions, 12 of which were German.

The enemy thrust on the Middle Isonzo last October brought disaster to Italian arms, but the wonderful recovery of the soldiers after the great retreat and the splendid determination of the people prevented that disaster being turned to full account. It was a terrible blow, that sent Italy staggering to the ropes. But Italy was game. Italy fought on, weary, breathless, almost heart-broken, but with a stubborn courage, with a spirit that burned unfaltering. The greater danger was overcome. And it is sometimes strangely forgotten that the enemy advance was checked before the troops dispatched in aid by Great Britain and France came into line. During the last three critical weeks of November, on the Piave and in the mountains, Italy fought alone.

In December too, although the British and French had taken up their positions, the enemy's last desperate effort to break through was directed entirely against the mountain line held by the Italians.

This year, in the middle of June, the Austrian Army on the Italian Front consisted of 73 divisions, practically the whole of Austria's effective strength. The total number of enemy battalions was 960, for it must be remembered that the Austrian division has not been reduced in strength, and is 25 per cent stronger than the British or German division of to-day. No fewer than 54 divisions (774 battalions), with 6000 guns (1), were massed upon the battle front between the Trentino and the sea. It should be fresh in the minds of all how the great Austrian attack came to absolute failure, broken to pieces against a resistance that was a luminous example of bravery and skill. We have only to think for a moment to see what the situation of the Allies would

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(1) Austria has always had a considerably larger number of guns on the whole front than Italy, though Italy, when she was attacking, was able to obtain a local superiority by concentration upon a given sector. During the great battle which began on June 15 of this year, the enemy superiority was calculated at 25 per cent, mainly in heavy and medium calibres.

have been to-day if these Austrian divisions could have been thrown upon the hard-pressed front in France. Yet this is only a particular, striking confirmation of the general truth, that without Italy, as without any one of the Allies, the war on land would have ended already in a German triumph.

Italy's chief material contribution to the Allied cause is to be found in the fact that she has fully occupied the attention, first, of half the Austrian Army, and now of all the troops which the Monarchy can put in line. Alike in victory and in defeat she has kept the enemy busy along her front. But her contribution does not end here. She plays a very important part in "keeping our end up" in the Balkans. For two years there has been a strong Italian force in Macedonia. By the spirit and fighting capacity of its troops, by its admirable organization and perfect equipment, this force has won the admiration of all who have come in contact with it. The Italian force in Albania, which has done first-class work both in battle and in opening up communications in a trackless country, forms the left wing of the Allied Balkan front and brings it in close touch with Italy. Thanks to the intervention of Italy, moreover, we can send our troops for the east overland as far as the southern Italian ports,



and so avoid two thousand miles of dangerous sea transport.

There is another point which has not received adequate attention. In order to concentrate her efforts on the main work of the war Italy has had to make a heavy sacrifice. When the newly-won colony of Libya blazed into insurrection under the influence of Turkish machinations and German gold, the Italians withdrew to the coast, and remained there, rather than divert from the common fields of struggle the troops which would have restored the situation. The strong temptation to reinforce the garrison by an adequate expeditionary force has always been resisted, and there has been complete acquiescence in the decision. Italy's allies should always remember that she sent troops to fight in the Balkans and in France when she could spare none to regain the ground lost in her own colony.

Italy's great military efforts have imposed a very severe strain upon the country. Out of a population of about 36 millions well over five million men have been taken for military service. Italy has not called upon her older classes to the same extent as Great Britain or France, but she has made a much cleaner sweep of the classes between 20 and 40 years of age, granting relatively fewer exemptions. When the attempt was



made to draw further upon the older men, it was found that the necessities of food production would not allow it. The critical food situation last year was partly due to shortage of labour, and the attempt to "comb out" further had to be abandoned. As it is, the agricultural districts are almost denuded of able-bodied men, and the work is carried on with great difficulty. The nineteen-year-old boys have long been in the field — some of them won bright laurels on the Piave last November — and the greater part of the 1900 class has already undergone its training.

Nor must the work of the Navy be forgotten. The problem of the Adriatic is immensely difficult, as those of the Allies who have co-operated with the Italian fleet have found. But some if not all of the difficulties have been solved. It is only occasionally that the veil can be lifted to allow a glimpse of the "silent work" that goes on unceasingly; till more can be told no picture can be given of the part played by the Italian Navy. There have been failures as well as successes, but some of the successes would give cause for pride to any Navy in the world. Captain Rizzo's feat of torpedoing the Austrian dreadnought *Szent Istvan* is one of the most brilliant exploits of the war, but it is not only the daring and skill of the act that bring honour to the Italian

Navy. Rizzo's splendid work was the fruit of months and years of patient watching. How many times have the little ships lain in wait, in vain? The truth only comes home when we realize that the *Szent Istvan* met her doom the first time that she went cruising in two-and-a-half years. But here again, on sea as on land, Italy's services may best be understood, not from a recital of successes, but from a general survey of the situation. Thanks to Italy's intervention and the Italian occupation of Valona the naval activities of the enemy have been largely thwarted and checked. We have only to keep in mind how the situation in the Mediterranean would have developed to the advantage of the enemy if the Allies had not held both sides of the Straits of Otranto.

The facts given in this chapter are most of them obvious and all elementary. But it is only by holding the broad facts steadily in view that we can appreciate the great part which Italy plays in the struggle for a better to-morrow.

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## CHAPTER V.

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### ANGLO-ITALIAN RELATIONS

**F**RIENDSHIP between Great Britain and Italy is traditional: its roots lie very far back. The Anglo-Saxon civilization is mainly based upon what we received from Rome and from the Italy of the Renaissance, and we have gone on drawing from Italy ever since. In the old days we were consciously pupil to master. Italy taught us, Italy gave to us, and it is our pride that we knew how to use her teaching and her gifts. No man of education, if he stops to think, can but be overwhelmed by the magnitude of our debt to Italy.

There came a time when it seemed we could do something towards the payment of that debt, when the Italian peoples were struggling towards freedom again. In those days British sympathy went out to Italy in full measure. English poets sang the Italian cause, and Italy's exiled patriots found shelter and support in England, drawing much from England and from the contact with English life and English culture. Yet even at

that moment, when we were paying some of our old debt, we were also incurring a new one. Italy was still giving royally. She was giving us Mazzini — the greatest prophet of the political principles for which the anti-German alliance is fighting to-day. We were not ripe for Mazzini then, and even now they are a limited number who recognize all that we owe him in the way of political thought. In fact, we have gone on taking from Italy, hardly knowing that we took. The contact so long established was still fruitful, but on our side the new gains were now largely unconscious. There was recognition of what we owed to the Italy of the past, but an incomplete appreciation of the new Italy. Sympathy and affection have been there, but not understanding.

Italy, on the other hand, was conscious of what she took from England. And she was more than grateful. There is no more striking instance of the reward that comes to genuine sympathy than the long persistence of the feeling towards England which was born in Italy during the struggle for her freedom. The official support that we gave to Italy was strictly limited. But Italy felt, and recorded on the tablets of her heart, the sympathy and moral support of the British people.

These were the controlling facts in the re-

lations between Great Britain and the new Kingdom. The friendship which has so happily remained unbroken was never based on protocol or the nice calculations of official diplomacy. It was a friendship, essentially, which had its strength in unofficial relations, in the mutual sympathy of informed opinion, in the possession of kindred ideals, in the recognition of what each race owed to, and could take from, the other. Given these foundations, official friendship was easy, almost inevitable, and there has never been any serious friction between the British and Italian Governments. It has been seen that a Mediterranean agreement with Great Britain was regarded by the best minds in Italy as the necessary complement to the Triple Alliance, but Italian policy went further than this. For twenty years after the formation of the Triple Alliance the declaration of the Italian Government stood on record, that the obligations of Italy under the terms of the Alliance should not apply as against Great Britain. Anglo-Italian friendship was still the centre-point of Italian policy.

It was not until towards the close of the nineteenth century that the opposition between the Alliance and the friendship began to define itself, and this opposition led to the weakening of both. The gradual accentuation of German hostility to



Great Britain, which placed the two Powers fairly and squarely in opposite camps, had a chilling influence upon the feeling of very many Italians towards the Triple Alliance. They feared that its obligations might bring Italy into direct antagonism with Great Britain, and they recognized that in any event the old relations were bound to be affected unfavourably. These relations were so affected. For there were other Italians who, faced by the apparent necessity of a choice between Great Britain and Germany, felt that the choice would have to be in favour of the ally rather than the friend.

Quite apart from the fact of the Alliance, there were strong reasons for such a decision. For, during the last twenty years before the war, or even a longer period, the contact between Italy and Great Britain had somehow loosened. There was warm friendship still, but it was rather the sentiment of old friends parted than that of comrades in close touch. Both countries, in fact, were suffering from German influence. Great Britain, without altogether knowing it, was being taken in by German pretensions to universal superiority. She was inclining to turn away from the Latin fount. And Italy was coming more and more definitely under German sway. This was inevitable. For France paid little attention to Italy;

English and Italian soldiers on the Italian Front.





Great Britain still divided her affections between Rome, the Renaissance and the Risorgimento; Germany studied the needs of the growing Kingdom. German bankers and men of business, German commercial travellers and German professors, all spread the German gospel throughout Italy, and few of them failed to preach that the days of the British Empire were more or less numbered. And it must be confessed that, so far as British efforts in Italy were concerned, there was not very much to indicate that the German apostles were wrong.

There were good reasons why German ideals, as they were understood before the war, should make special appeal to Italians bent upon progress. Germany seemed to stand, above all things, for organization and order; she was strong where Italy felt herself weak. Germany was the home of respect for the State, of social discipline, of patient attention to detail. The average Italian was still inclined to look upon the Government as his natural enemy. His intense individualism resented the impositions of the State, and Italian organization too often broke down owing to light-hearted disregard of small but essential factors. Thinking Italians saw their own weakness, and many of them came to the conclusion that the remedy was to be found in Germany.

German patience and thoroughness, German order and discipline (very well advertised by eloquent servants of the German plan) commended themselves widely in Italy. Yet, even before the war, there was a growing feeling that the German influence made for harm, concealed a danger. When Italian disciples of Germanism began to preach the Prussian faith, the conscience and instinct of Italy began to work. And when the great test came, Italy's rejection of the real Germanism was definite and emphatic.

This should have been the moment for a renewal of all the old warmth of feeling between Great Britain and Italy. We had always been friends, even if latterly we had lost contact a little, and now at last we were allies, fighting side by side in the most tremendous military struggle between good and evil that the world has ever known. Yet it is true that there has been almost more misunderstanding between Great Britain and Italy during the three years of our alliance than when we were nominally ranged on opposite sides of the widening gulf that cut Europe in two. In these three years we have reaped the fruit of the long period when we were growing apart unconsciously, believing ourselves close friends but losing the mutual knowledge we once had.

The misunderstandings came very easily.



There was always someone to make mischief, wilfully, by playing upon ignorance, or innocently, by jumping at unjustified conclusions. Enemy propaganda worked untiringly in Italy, to suggest that Great Britain had dragged Italy into the war for her own selfish purposes, that the loans we gave bore an enormous rate of interest, and that we were bleeding our allies by the exorbitant prices of the necessities we sold to them and by the vast sums charged for freight. These were gross falsehoods, easily exposed, if only London and Rome had put their heads together and agreed to speak. But no such simple solution commended itself. To take one point alone, it was not until 38 months after Italy's entry into the war that the British Government announced officially that it lent money to Italy at a slightly lower rate than it paid to investors in British War Loans.

These and kindred misunderstandings would never have made any progress if they had been promptly tackled at the outset. As it was, the charges remained unanswered so long that they sank in and affected many minds. They were the more readily accepted as conditions of life became more difficult and the casualty lists grew longer. The increase of suffering and sacrifice gave point to the enemy suggestions, false though they were.



Critics of Great Britain were on firmer ground when they alleged that we were slow to understand Italy's difficulties and needs and to appreciate her war aims. And they were unassailably right when they complained that both Great Britain and France discriminated between Germany and Austria, showing a different degree of enmity to the two chief enemies. It was natural that British and French popular opinion should make this discrimination. We and the French were at close grips with Germany; Austria's efforts were only directed against our allies. What made the question more serious was that both British and French Governments appeared to have, and did have, a certain tenderness for Austria. For long, moreover, they clung to the belief that Austria could be "detached" from her alliance with the arch-criminal.

This attitude naturally caused anxiety in Italy. Italians were not unready to accept the contention that Germany was the chief villain, the more dangerous foe to civilization. But the more immediate danger to them came from Austria, and they knew very well, what Englishmen were very slow to understand, that the Habsburg Monarchy was Germany's vassal, bound hand and foot to Germany's designs. They saw in the relatively Austrophil tendency of Great Britain and

France a very grave danger to Italy's future, and the apprehension thus aroused explains many things. It explains, above all, one of the main causes for the misunderstanding in England of Italy's part in the war, and of her war aims.

These causes may be classed under three heads :

1. The delay in the Italian declaration of war against Germany, which gave great opportunity to mischief-makers.

2. The appearance of detachment from the general aims of the Alliance, and of an Imperialistic tendency ; an appearance which arose from a few unfortunate phrases, from the exaggerations of a section of the Italian press, and from a misunderstanding of the London Agreement.

3. The failure to appreciate the great difficulties by which the Italian Government and the Italian Army were faced, and the achievements to their credit.

The third question has been treated in the first four chapters. The other two points can be dealt with much more briefly.

When Italy declared war against Austria it was expected that Germany's declaration of war against Italy would follow as a matter of course. Prince von Bülow had warned Baron Sonnino that

war with Austria meant war with Germany, and Italy was fully prepared for the complete break. A month previously she had signed the London Agreement, which pledged her to consider the enemies of the Triple Entente as hers, and to make war against them "with all means at her disposal."

The formal declaration of hostilities obviously fell to be made by Germany, but the German Government held its hand. Weeks passed, months; and still the German Government kept silent. German submarines attacked Italian shipping; a few German troops and German guns appeared in the field against Italy; people began to ask why Italy did not take the step that should have been taken by Germany. In short, matters went as Germany had calculated; for it is fairly certain that Germany refrained from declaring war against Italy not only in the expectation of encouraging the Italian Neutralists to further efforts, but in the hope of creating distrust of Italy in the minds of her new allies. People began to exercise their suspicious faculties, and some who ought to have known better declared that Italy was playing a double game, that she wished to keep a foot in the enemy's camp. In support of this theory it was alleged that on the eve of war Italy had concluded a secret treaty with Germany which clearly showed how the land lay.

This was mere gossip. There was an agreement between Italy and Germany, but it was not secret, and it was not of the kind suggested. When Italian intervention was imminent the Italian Government proposed both to Germany and to Austria that in the event of war each country should 1) respect private property belonging to the subjects of the other within its own borders, and 2) permit the repatriation of the other's subjects. The first provision worked out to the advantage of Germany and Austria, who had important interests in Italy. The second, on the other hand, favoured Italy; for there was a very large number of Italians, principally of the working class, resident in Germany and Austria.

Germany accepted the Italian proposal, while Austria did not; and the fact of the agreement was the basis for much mischievous speculation. Yet it was practically nothing more than an attempt to re-affirm principles which had generally been supposed to govern the conduct of States at war. And it deliberately provided for war between Italy and Germany. That it could be made the foundation of a critical attitude towards Italy was altogether unfair. But the fact shows how Italy's position was compromised in the public opinion of her Allies by the delay in formally declaring war against Germany.

The true reason for the delay was not political, but military. Politically, the situation was fully covered by Italy's undertakings under the London Agreement, and by her subsequent adhesion to the Pact of London. In point of fact it was only Italy who suffered from the absence of formal hostilities between herself and Germany. From the military point of view the delay was almost certainly a gain. In any event it was prudent, and fully justified. In consideration of Italy's military weakness during the first year of the war, and of the fact that her Allies could spare her little help, it was quite obviously to the general advantage of the Alliance that she should not have to face Germany as well as Austria. Germany's game was to go for the weaker adversaries, one after the other, and the possession of the interior lines gave her a great advantage. A premature declaration of war on the part of Italy might very well have hastened the day when Germany saw that she had nothing to expect from her old friends, and so led to an attack that Italy could hardly have withstood. Italy had to face the risk of such an attack when she made her original declaration of war against Austria, but it was to her advantage, and ours, that she should gain time.

The misunderstanding regarding Italy's position





The monument to Dante in Trento.



The old Cathedral of S. Giusto in Trieste.





vis-à-vis to Germany was in the main removed, though not altogether, by the formal declaration of war which came two years ago. The second misunderstanding still persists.

It was perhaps only natural that British public opinion should be affected unfavourably by the claims and arguments put forward, ably and persistently, by a limited number of extremists. For British public opinion was not able to estimate the weight of Italian opinion behind these utterances, and sections of the British press exaggerated their significance to an astonishing degree, attributing to them an importance and an inspiration which they never possessed. A similar exaggerated importance, or rather a misinterpretation, was given to certain phrases — "sacred egoism", "our war", "Italy will act on her own" — which were taken as meaning that Italy's policy was primarily selfish, and that particular Italian interests necessarily took precedence of the demands of the common cause. If that were true, it would merely fix upon Italy a charge that might at times have been brought with an equal show of justice against each one of the Allies, especially during the earlier part of the war. But these phrases never meant what most outside critics took them to mean. Their true import has been very well explained by a writer in the *Anglo-Italian Review*, who says:

" They were not the expression of an active  
" policy, but were a reply to and a reaction  
" against the accusations that had been made  
" against Italy — certainly of Austrian and Ger-  
" man origin — to the effect that Italy had been  
" bought by France and England and dragged  
" into the war against her will. They expressed  
" Italian-indignation at these accusations and denied  
" them by asserting that Italy had not come into  
" the war at the orders or the request of others,  
" but on her own initiative and for her own  
" ends ".

The phrases which made such an unfortunate impression in certain quarters were never intended to be an indication of Italy's attitude towards the world struggle. They were a definite answer to a definite insinuation — an answer moreover that was framed to appeal to a special audience, the Italian people: not to the wider audience of the world. An understanding of Italy's circumstances would have prevented misinterpretation. A consideration of Italy's actions would have had the same result. But this was a case where words spoke louder than actions, or at least made more impression upon uninformed minds.

Unfortunately the charge of imperialism, and of the pursuit of ends incompatible with the general aims of the Allies, seemed at first sight, to

many people at least, to find support in the terms of the London Agreement of April 1915.

The terms of that Agreement do undoubtedly depart from the principle of nationality which has come to be the inspiring idea of the Allied programme. Leaving aside the question how far certain of the war aims of Italy's allies, as stated from time to time and subsequently revealed, conform to the principle of nationality, an examination of the circumstances which governed the London Agreement shows that much of the criticism levelled against it is wide of the mark.

The main cause of offence lies of course in the fact that the fulfilment of its terms would imply too great a renunciation on the part of the Southern Slavs, whose freedom and unity now form part of the Allied programme. But Southern Slav independence was certainly not in the Allied programme in April 1915 or for long afterwards. The London Agreement was not directed against a potential Yugoslavia, in whose possible creation only a few men who had given the subject special study at that time believed, but against Italy's traditional enemy — Austria.

If the Habsburg Empire survived the war, it was essential for Italy to secure certain frontiers and to assure her naval position in the Adriatic,

and at that date there was little reason to believe that the Habsburg Empire would not survive the war. In point of fact, when the London Agreement was signed and for nearly three years after, Italy's Allies cherished the hope that Austria could be detached from Germany and forced to a separate peace. The liberation of Austria's subject races was obviously incompatible with such a hope, and until very recently none of the Allied Governments seem to have thought seriously of an independent Yugoslavia.

Nor was it clear in 1915 that the Yugoslav movement had sufficient support from the Yugoslavs. To those who reproach Italy with slowness in appreciating the reality of the movement the answer may very well be given that it was not until the end of the third year of the war that the Southern Slav representatives agreed upon a statement of their own aims. Till these aims were published in the Pact of Corfu it was not at all clear that the Serbians and the various representatives of the Southern Slavs of the Monarchy were in agreement as to the future they desired. There still remained the question how far the exiled leaders of the Croats, Slovenes and Serbs of the Monarchy could speak for their countrymen. That question still formed an obstacle to cautious minds, but for the majority of

thinking Italians the Pact of Corfu removed the main difficulty in the way of coming to an understanding with the Southern Slavs. A number of writers and speakers had long advocated such an understanding, but it was difficult to press the matter when there was no pledge of unity of intention on the other side.

The publication of the Pact of Corfu had an immediate effect in Italy. The movement in favour of an understanding at once gathered strength and impetus, and it led straight to the historic Congress of Nationalities oppressed by Austria, which was held in Rome in April 1918. The way was not easy for those who worked to this great end. The movement was checked at the very outset by the apparent lack of sympathy with Italian aims, and the evident *tendresse* for Austria, displayed by the speeches of certain Allied ministers. It was checked again, for a moment, by the disaster of Caporetto.

The suggestion has been made, by some in good faith, by some in malice, that Caporetto was responsible for the understanding between Italians and Southern Slavs — that Italy's eyes were only opened by misfortune. That is wholly untrue. The fact is that Caporetto made many hesitate to press the movement. They foresaw the comment that would be made, that has been



made ; and they held back. It was only after much searching of heart that they renewed their efforts.

It is necessary to emphasize the fact that it was not only " Italian Imperialism " which proved an obstacle to an understanding between Italian and Southern Slav. The Italian Nationalist had his counterpart in the Yugoslav extremist, who was as anxious to swallow lands indubitably Italian as the Nationalist was to annex Slav territories. It was unfortunate that those Englishmen who rebuked Italy for Imperialism had no open word of blame for certain Slav claims. The apparent onesidedness of their judgment did a good deal to retard progress towards the understanding they desired. For it made Italians hesitate to renounce what was assured to them by bond, and it helped those whose aim it was to make mischief between Italy and Great Britain.

The Rome Congress gave formal sanction to an understanding between Italy and the Southern Slavs that was based, practically speaking, on a readiness to renounce particular aims for the sake of the common cause. It meant that in the event of the hoped-for victory both sides agreed to abate the maximum programmes put forward in the Agreement of London and the Pact of Corfu

respectively. And the Italian Premier's speech to the delegates to the Congress gave Government approval to its declarations.

Circumstances had changed. There was now the hope at least that the truth about Austria was beginning to be realized by the Allies. It may be that some of the original demands of the London Agreement were ill-advised, that it would have better to think less of apparent security and risk something for an ideal, even though that ideal had so far commended itself to none of the Allies. It is more easy to see clearly to-day. Those who criticize the Italian attitude as shown by the London Agreement, or are impatient at the caution still displayed in certain quarters, would do well to remind themselves how long it took for Italy's Allies to understand the meaning of Austria, how late in time it was before the cause of the oppressed nationalities was fully recognized by them.

Italy's claims are not, and never were, imperialist in nature. She claims the recovery of her unredeemed lands and frontier positions that shall give her a fair chance of self-defence. In so far as her claims have been extended to localities not inhabited by Italians, these claims may be justified by that necessity for "guarantees"

which has been invoked by our own statesmen. If to-day Italy can consider the possibility of waiving some of these "guarantees", it is because her Allies as well as herself have seen more clearly.

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View of Trento.



View of Trieste.






## CHAPTER VI.

### ITALY AND THE PEOPLE OF ITALY

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REAT Britain and Italy are allies now and for after the war, and there is urgent reason that each should know what manner of men they are who are fighting side by side. The meeting of Italians and British on the same fronts should mean the best kind of propaganda. Countless Italians have learned more about Englishmen from the men they have met in the Italian war zone than they could have done in any other way. Thousands of Englishmen should carry back from their stay in the country a far truer impression of Italy and the Italians than the vast majority of the tourists who have visited Italy. And they will spread the knowledge. But they are few, after all. The handicap of language is great, and the contact is limited. There is always room for explanation and illustration.

It is never an easy matter to explain the people of one nation to those of another, and



there is a special difficulty in the case of Italians and Englishmen. It is not only that we differ greatly. The task is made harder by the fact that each, generally speaking, starts with a wrong idea of the other. Happily, there is a natural sympathy which tides over many misunderstandings, but if we could add to the sympathy a better knowledge, the misunderstandings would arise much less often.

At the beginning of the war the Austrians dubbed the Italians "mandoline-players". The Italians accepted the name, and many a time they have made the Austrians dance to their tune. But at the time it was given, in derision, it represented a tendency that was not confined to Austria alone. What did the world know of Italy before the war, such part of the world at least as had no real contact with the Italians of to-day? Italy was a storehouse of art, a marvellous museum set in enchanting surroundings, a perennial fount of music — all kinds of music from grand opera to the open-air songs of Naples and Venice. A country of colour and form and light and song — this was the popular impression among those who had never seen Italy : and of those who had visited the country how many saw beyond the first fascination, unless to find grounds for complaint in the hotels or the cabs or the train service?

How many touched the people of Italy, the real people, not merely those who cater for tourists, and are too often spoiled by them?

It was all very natural, of course. The young Kingdom of Italy was overshadowed by the monuments of a tremendous past, and what we should call its more serious activities were lost sight of in the dazzle of Italian sunlight. We came to Italy to look upon ancient memorials, to rejoice in her beauty of landscape and of climate. In short, we came to search, not for Italy but for certain special things which we knew Italy had to give us. We took these, and too often imagined that these were all her gifts. The records of her storied centuries, the achievements of her long artistic prime, the sunshine of certain favoured spots, the charm of a friendly and polished people — these called the world to study and to recreation. There was so much in Italy — small wonder that most of us saw only a portion, the portion that seemed specially hers.

The past and the arts: these were Italy's, by obvious right. The world agreed, but the world did not see the fresh growth springing from Italy's eternally fertile soil. The world saw the hundreds of singers, and was blind to the millions of workers. So much so that you cannot blame the angry iconoclast youth of Italy which

cursed her museums and called her to break away from the traditions which, men said, were all that she had. Some of these defiant champions of the New Italy would shut up or sell the paintings and the sculptures, the churches and the palaces, and hush the singing voices. So Italy would be free from her legendary attributes, and would be seen for what she is. They are wrong, of course — these extremists. The Italy which they would force upon the world is no more the real Italy than is the image they would destroy. The heritage which they would cast aside is the real basis of Italy's progress, but they have been driven to their extreme position by the attitude of other nations, which finally brought the despairing conviction that Italy's past prevented a just appreciation of Italy's present, and prejudiced her hopes for the future.

Such a conclusion is the fruit of exasperation, but the exasperation is natural. Too many of those who came to Italy paid no regard to the progress made by the young kingdom, except in so far as that progress diminished the attractions of the holiday playground. People shook their heads over the disappearance of this or that picturesque slum, and complained that prices were going up. There was increased comfort, of course, if you stopped to think of that. There was always the beauty of colour and outline, and the

churches and the galleries, and the museums. And charming light tenor voices still rang through the streets or across the water. For the tourist Italy was still Italy, in spite of change.

And all the while, beneath the effervescence that held the eye of the casual beholder, a people was striving, a nation was consolidating. There is a widely current belief that the Italian is incapable of hard work, a belief that is based, no doubt, upon a hasty generalization from an experience of the beggars of Naples or the touts of tourist Rome. Yet there are few harder toilers in the world than the Italian peasant, and of late years Italians have done much of the rough navvy work in Western Europe and America. They build the railways and the roads, the bridges, the dams and the power-stations. They work hard and fare hard all the world over. Italian labour made the State of São Paulo in Brazil. Italian labour is the best in all the mixed population of Argentina. The Italian navy is the most satisfactory in the United States. Before the war almost all the rough manual work of Switzerland, except for agriculture, was done by Italians, and Italian labour was sought for in France, Germany and Austria. Italians were doing their full share, and perhaps more than their share, in the hard work of the world, and

yet the old legend persisted of a lazy, go-as-you-please Italy, that worked with one hand only while the other held a mandoline or a guitar.

No doubt the misunderstanding arises partly from the latent conviction that the two things — work and song — cannot flourish side by side. In England at least we are still suspicious of the arts. But the main reason lies in the failure to realize the astonishing progress made by Italy in the last half-century, and especially in the last twenty years. Fifty years ago the legend was still largely true. Italy was backward, in terms of what we call civilization. General conditions were very bad. There was great misery and in some districts great disorder. Most of the country had but recently been freed from intolerable misgovernment — alien or clerical. Poverty and oppression had weighed heavily upon the land, crushing effort, seeking in vain to stifle thought. Only the arts had freedom.

In the days before the unity of Italy general well-being, general material progress, were impossible. In the days that immediately followed, progress was necessarily slow. There was so much to be done, so little money to do it with, and above all there was the handicap of long disunion and long misgovernment, with its legacies of suspicion and of the sense that labour was vain.



Not fifty years have gone past since the troops of United Italy entered Rome. Not twenty-five have elapsed since the finances of the Kingdom were put on a stable footing, and Italians began to devote themselves seriously to industrial enterprise. The progress made in these years is astonishing, to all who have the eyes to see and the will to understand. Nor is it only material progress that is evident. The easing of material circumstances, the widening of opportunity, the growth of confidence, have given a chance for development that is not only material. The country grows in every way, as the keen Latin intelligence finds fuller scope, and the generous Latin heart no more need live shut in upon itself. Here was the greatest curse of foreign dominion: not the material oppression, but the moral bondage that denied freedom both to heart and brain, that bred suspicion and choked fine impulse.

Italy is not yet altogether free from the effects of that bondage, and of the long divisions between the Italian peoples. How could she be, after less than fifty years? The worst legacy is the lack of confidence, the individual's mistrust both of himself and of his neighbour, which still handicaps the development of Italy, which checks effort and co-operation. The Italian is not yet quite sure of himself, even when he says that he



is. And the habit bred of long misrule still warns him to be slow in trusting his neighbour.

It is all so natural, if we will only remember that though the history of Italy goes back to the beginnings of European civilization this new re-flowering of the race is very recent. Here is the great contradiction that explains, if anything can, the Italians of today. An old race, a young kingdom — Italy of today is the heir of a unique ancestry, but she has not yet come to full stature. They wrong her future who claim that she is already full-grown.

Modern Italy is still in the making, but the splendid material is ready to hand. Italy may find it hard to win great riches, owing to lack of coal and a scant supply of metals. But water-power may largely take the place of coal, and there are untapped metal resources which will lessen the Italian dependence upon imports. A large prosperity will certainly come. But it is the human material that will chiefly count in the making of the country ; here lies the greatest contribution to the world.

It is an indestructible breed that springs from Italian soil, a breed that persists triumphant through prosperity and devastation. Twice it has gone down in ruin before the German barbarism and twice it has risen and come to its own



**Victor Emanuel Orlando**

The Italian Premier.

(1917-1918).



**General Armando Diaz**

Commander in Chief of the Italian Army



again. It is "the Third Italy" that is fighting today the fight which Rome fought and that Second Italy of the Renaissance, the fight for civilization against Germanism. Rome went down at the last, and when Rome fell the whole Western World was plunged in darkness. The Second Italy succumbed to the pressure of that German organization which was known as the Holy Roman Empire, but before the Second Italy fell others had lit their torches at the flame of civilization which she had re-kindled. And her own light never went out, though freedom was eclipsed by division and oppression. Even in her periods of "decay" Italy gave richly to the world, in science, in art, in literature.

Then came the great upspringing. The Italy that was a mere "geographical expression" brought forth three giant figures, a statesman, a thinker and dreamer, a leader of men — Cavour, Mazzini, Garibaldi — three authentic giants whose reputation still grows with the passage of time. These were great men, symbols of true greatness in the race, and there have been great Italians since. But it is always misleading to judge a country by its great figures, and it is perhaps specially misleading in the case of Italy. To understand Italy you must know the people.

To begin with, the "people" of Italy is not

less diversified than the people of the United Kingdom. The stock is as mixed, though it has been longer in the blending, and political union is very recent. It is as difficult to find a "typical Italian" as a "typical Briton", though in both cases people are very ready to write out the label and affix it. There are all kinds: two anecdotes from the war zone are proof enough. At the one extreme there is the canny *Alpino* reservist, who at the end of a day's stiff fighting in the mountains had expended only 37 cartridges. He explained that he never fired unless he was certain of hitting. As a taxpayer he objected to waste of ammunition. At the other extreme you might place the light-hearted Neapolitan *Bersagliere*, who dragged an unexploded shell back to his trench, and when he was stormed at for his folly and told to leave his prize in case it should burst, made the placid reply: "We've given it such a shaking that if it hasn't burst already it isn't likely to now".

Generalization is difficult when the national label includes types so well defined and differentiated as the Piedmontese and the Neapolitan, the Venetian and the Sicilian, the Tuscan and the Calabrian, and the Roman who holds himself apart from and above all the rest. The North, which is well advanced upon the path of material

prosperity, proclaims its superiority over the more backward South and often shows impatience with eternal Rome herself. Rome is unmoved, for Rome is Rome (you might find a parallel in the case of Lancashire and London), but the South retorts upon the North, and with justice, that it has had far more leeway to make up, and that it has been neglected by successive governments. They hardly know one another as yet — the North and the South. It is not long since they recognized they both belonged to Italy. And a poignant reminder of the newness of Italy's freedom and unity is given by the simple exclamation of a soldier to whom the King had talked on one of his numberless visits to the advanced lines :  
" Why, the King is an Italian like ourselves ! "

The war is cementing Italy into a real whole. When peace comes it may be hoped that " localism " will have grown to a wiser patriotism, for the essential differences are certainly no greater than between Englishman and Scot. When Romans and Sardinians, Genoese and Tuscans, Lombards and Sicilians, have fought and suffered together, when each has seen how the other lives and jokes and sings, and how he dies, real understanding is born, and Italy's sons are true brothers at last. There was an old story that the Southerners were poor soldiers. No doubt



they were when they fought for the Bourbons. The Italian is too intelligent to make good "cannon-fodder" in the service of an alien despot. To day the troops of the South are certainly not less efficient than those of the North; some would even give them the palm. And this although they are not spurred on by traditional hatred of the Austrian; for they never knew the Austrian oppressor. Southern troops have done wonderful things in the war, because they understand what they are fighting for. They know that they are fighting for Italy, but they know more than that. The instinct and the intelligence that are their heritage have made them understand something of the nature of the world-struggle.

Intelligence — that is one common factor that runs from north to south, though Italy too has her Boeotia and her Auvergne. Taken all round there is no race that can compare with the Italian for true intelligence, not mere sharpness. It comes, I suppose, from two thousand years of civilization, experienced by a gifted complex of races. It has little to do with knowledge, for Italy's system of education is still very deficient: a great part of her population is unlettered, and would be described as ignorant. They *are* ignorant, according to some standards, but they have minds. A lightning quickness to grasp new things,

a power of thinking and of reasoning, an interest in the world — these are qualities that you find far down the scale of society. The natural mental gifts of all classes are such that Italy, of all the European countries, seems to furnish the best material for a true democracy. And the Italian has the natural gift of manners. His is the politeness of the naturally "gentle", that never approaches servility.

There are many people, both Italians and foreigners, who say of the Italian lower classes that they are like children. It is half a truth. They are like children in their impressionability, in their easy content, their ready laughter, their quick anger. They are like children in the disconcerting accuracy of their instinctive judgments. They are like children because they are untaught, and because they are unbent to discipline. They are like children, too, in that contradictory mixture of extreme frankness and extreme reserve. And most of all they are like children because of their unspoiled eagerness and the small sum of their needs. Yet the comparison is only half true, because even the ignorant Italian seems to have a philosophy which saves him from the bitter griefs and resentments of childhood. He seldom cries for the moon, and though there are in him impulses and strivings which may carry him far, he

is, generally at least, essentially reasonable. It has been said above that he lacks the sense of discipline. In a manner that is true. The Italian is intolerant of certain interferences which are a part of social discipline. He is remarkably careless of regulations, though part of his carelessness is due to a knowledge that a charitable authority is not always rigidly insistent upon the enforcement of its rulings. Yet the place of organized discipline is largely supplied by an astonishing patience, a philosophic and dignified good humour under the trials of life.

Perhaps, until recently, there has been too little of the "divine discontent" that leads to progress — too much acquiescence, too easy a philosophy. But it is only recently that opportunity has been given, and the Italian people is waking to it. The new generation was certain to bring changes, and the war will have hastened their coming.

For one thing, the war will have brought confidence. Practically no Italian would have believed that Italy could stand the test which she has stood and is standing. They did not know the strength and valour of their own people. Now they understand, and Italy's allies must understand. The strain upon Italy has been very heavy, and she has answered nobly. There have

been greater privations in Italy than in any other of the Entente countries, and the "undisciplined" Italian people, even more individualist than the British, has suffered in touching patience. It has suffered cruel hardship and it has suffered grievous loss.

"They will never stand the casualties" — this was the fear that lay at the hearts of many leading Italians. Family affection is a notable feature of Italian life, and there was keen anxiety as to the effect of the losses upon the population. The losses have been far beyond any expectation. Of the men who have been called to the colours one-sixth have lost their lives or been dismissed from the Army as permanently unfit (1). The Italian government has never permitted a detailed statement of casualties, and as a result the sacrifices made have been strangely underestimated by Italy's allies. It may be hoped that the rough figure given here will help to bring home the truth.

The country has borne its burden of grief and suffering unflinchingly, and the Italian soldier has stood punishment as well as those of any army — the dreadful punishment of modern war

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(1) This figure does not include the heavy losses of the last triumphant offensive.

which has never been approached before. Often, through lack of skill, the losses have been heavier than they need have been. Always they have been increased beyond the inevitable figure by a shortage in guns and shells. Italy's soldiers have been very hardly tried, and they have given a magnificent response. The answer of the country has been no less splendid. Italy knows now that she may trust Italians. Faith is growing. The future is sure.

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MAP OF THE FOURTH ITALIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE.





## POSTSCRIPT

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**T**HESE chapters were passing through the press when the resistance of the enemy nations crumbled, with such startling suddenness at the last. It follows that certain passages became out of date, but the broad lines of argument are not affected, save perhaps in one instance. Once more, and finally, by the last battle in the mountains and beyond the Piave, victory has crowned Italian effort. Italy's services to the common cause should be more apparent now.

Yet even at the moment of success the tendency to underestimate Italian achievements remained alive. This continued failure to appreciate the part played by Italy was due to a complex of causes. In the first place, during the two months previous to the final blow there had been much criticism directed against the Italian High Command for its delay in striking. The British and French forces in France were hammering relent-

lessly at the German armies ; a sudden thrust finished Bulgaria ; the Turks were being brought to their knees, thanks to the irresistible advance of the British forces in Palestine and Mesopotamia. Only the Italian front remained inactive, save for some successful local operations in September. In England and France it was asked : " What is the Italian Army doing ? " and the question was put even more urgently in Italy. The successful Italian advance in Albania and the break-up of General Pflanzer Baltin's army did not seem a sufficient answer. And it was not sufficient, especially for Italians. The question was far more important for Italy than for her Allies. For Italy keenly desired to play her full part in the victory that now at last seemed surely promised.

An Italian offensive had been foreshadowed for the first half of September, but General Diaz did not consider it wise to move so soon. His decision gave rise to criticism, but if the facts are fairly faced it will surely be difficult to maintain the critical attitude. The enemy were superior in numbers, and greatly superior in artillery, and they had an immense advantage in positions. Ten Austro-Hungarian divisions had been moved to other fronts since the Italian victory in June, but 63 divisions still lay between the Stelvio and

the sea. Facing these were 51 Italian divisions, three British, two French, a Czecho-Slovak Legion and an American regiment. And the reserves were already nearly exhausted. It is clear that an offensive was risky. A failure to achieve a big success might have reinforced for a time the internal situation in Austria-Hungary, which was quickly going from bad to worse, and to ensure a big success a clean break through was necessary. General Diaz asked for a large contingent of American troops so that he might have adequate reserves, but his arguments were not considered to justify the removal of these troops from France, where the principal struggle was being fought out.

In the end General Diaz decided to attack with the forces he had on the spot and stake all upon this single effort. His decision was taken late in September. Events had marched quickly during the previous month, and it was calculated that the enemy's power of resistance was weakening. From the purely military point of view there still seemed grave risk in attacking, but the chances of success were undoubtedly greater. General Diaz took his decision and laid his plans, and events showed that the moment was rightly chosen. The attacking forces had the handicap of very unfavourable weather. The mountains were shrouded in mist and channels of the Piave



were filled with roaring flood water. There was heavy and uncertain fighting for several days, and there were many anxious moments. But the will to victory was with the attackers. The enemy Fifth and Sixth Armies were separated by a magnificent thrust. The breach was rapidly widened, and, when the front was pierced and one of the main lines of communication was threatened, the enemy resistance crumbled. The Italian plan was brilliant in idea, and it was splendidly executed, in spite of the delay caused by the flooded river. In one of the critical sectors two British divisions, which were included in a mixed Italian and British Army entrusted by General Diaz to the command of Lord Cavan, played a very conspicuous part, and the French contingent was equally worthy of the national reputation. Perhaps the heaviest fighting of all fell to the lot of the Italian Fourth Army in the mountain sector between the Piave and the Brenta, whose duty it was to deceive the enemy into thinking that the attack in this sector was the principal move. The centre point of the whole scheme was the action of the Italian Eighth Army under General Caviglia, and its task was finely accomplished in spite of great difficulties. But where all did so well, it would be invidious to select any particular troops for praise.

In England, owing to the meagreness of the official *communiqués* and the way in which the battle developed, the skilfulness of the plan and the magnitude of the operations were not at first understood. Some comments went very far astray, and there was a tendency to believe that the enemy made little resistance. Until his front was broken, by the skill of the battle-plan and the splendid fighting of the attacking troops, his defence was stubborn enough, as the tale of losses will show. But he was outmanoeuvred and outfought, and in the end his courage gave way. Resistance changed rapidly to retreat, and retreat to rout and surrender. The Austrian Army ceased to exist. A few hours before the armistice came into force General Diaz was able to announce the capture of 300,000 prisoners and 5000 guns. The total number of prisoners exceeded 700,000 and remnants of the Austrian army streamed north and east in complete disorder, leaving the remainder of its guns behind.

A year after the Caporetto disaster Italy inflicted upon her traditional enemy a smashing defeat which led to the complete break-up of the tottering Habsburg Monarchy. In the words of a comment published at the time, she "has by her own courage and her own strength finally beaten back the secular danger from across the

Alps. She is mistress at last in her own house, and she has the proud gratification of feeling that she has achieved her complete liberation after a moral recovery from crushing disaster that is scarce paralleled in history ". This was the great achievement that proves the Italian nation in the sight of all the world — the refusal to own defeat, the stubborn resolve that led first to successful resistance, and at the last to victory, decisive and complete.

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## NOTE

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**T**HE official statement of Italy's losses during the war fully confirms the indications given in the preceding pages. The number of Italian dead is 467, 934, or precisely 1. 3 per cent of the estimated population of Italy in 1915. This percentage is practically identical with the proportion which the British total of dead (including the casualties at sea, but making a conservative deduction for deaths among Indian and other coloured troops) bears to the white population of the British Empire. And Italy's losses were suffered in a shorter period than ours, by nine months. None may now question the extent of her sacrifice.

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